



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the Ceremony on the contribution
of Saudi Arabia to improve the presence
of the Arabic language
in UNESCO**

UNESCO, 10 December 2007

Your Royal Highness Prince Khalid bin Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud,
Deputy Minister of Defense and General Inspector of Military Affairs
of Saudi Arabia, Vice President of the Board
of the Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud Foundation,

Your Highness Prince Khaled al Mashari, Vice Minister of Education
of Saudi Arabia,

Honourable Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to UNESCO,
Honourable Ambassador of the Arab League to UNESCO,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to UNESCO headquarters on this very special occasion.

Allow me to first pay tribute to his Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defense and Aviation and Inspector General of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

I had the pleasure of meeting with the Crown Prince in July 2006 to discuss the overall cooperation between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and UNESCO. On that occasion, the Crown Prince had underscored that "UNESCO is a key partner for the development of international and scientific cooperation" and had announced his donation of \$US 1 million to UNESCO, "in order to help the Organization enhance the quality of its action."

I know of his personal dedication and generosity in support of UNESCO's programmes and his commitment to the Arab culture. This generous contribution to improve the presence of the Arabic language in UNESCO is another testimony of the royal family's longstanding dedication to the ideals of our Organization.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to His Royal Highness Prince Khalid Bin Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz, who has done us the honour of coming all the way from Saudi Arabia to be with us on this auspicious occasion. Your Highness, I am very pleased to greet you at UNESCO Headquarters.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of UNESCO's founding principles is the free exchange of ideas and knowledge among peoples and cultures. Indeed, the preamble to its Constitution states that the "wide diffusion of culture [...] is indispensable to the dignity of men".

Languages of course have a key role in diffusing knowledge. Arabic itself has played a crucial role through history in this regard. This is certainly why our founding fathers decided that Arabic should be one of the six official languages of UNESCO and one of the six working languages of the General Conference and the Executive Board.

UNESCO strongly believes that linguistic diversity reflects the natural richness of the human existence and the wealth of different cultural and social identities. Indeed, linguistic diversity serves as a unifying bond for all mankind and as a key to mutual respect, tolerance and peace.

Unfortunately, budgetary constraints have repeatedly prevented UNESCO to fully apply the wealth of multilinguism to its own documents and communication tools. This is why we are immensely grateful today to have the possibility thanks to this generous offer to correct this imbalance with regard to Arabic.

The first and the most visible action which will be undertaken is the further development of Arabic on the UNESCO portal. The Organization's website is very often the public's first contact with UNESCO, and thus it is essential that Arabic, the official language of 21 of its Member States, be easily available and usable.

Since September 2005 and the launching of the Arabic version of UNESCO's website homepage, about 5% of the information available on the English version of the portal has been made available in Arabic. This generous donation will allow UNESCO to drastically increase this percentage, thus giving Arab States better access to the UNESCO portal and ensuring that information about UNESCO activities reaches a much wider audience.

The funding will also go towards the training of Arabic translators, and particularly translators from the Arab region. Good translators and standardized terminology are prerequisites for providing quality translation on the Web and in key UNESCO publications.

This donation will thus enable UNESCO to develop its network of external Arabic collaborators. We will notably train promising young translation graduates from the Arab region by offering them intensive in-service training here at UNESCO headquarters, enabling them to become part of UNESCO's translation roster.

Finally, the funds will be used for Arabic interpreting services for meetings and conferences organized by UNESCO, enabling Arabic speakers to express themselves in their mother tongue, and to have other languages translated into Arabic.

Your Royal Highness, let me now, in recognition of your action and support towards the promotion of Arab culture at UNESCO and within the international community, present you with UNESCO's 60th anniversary medal. This medal demonstrates our shared commitment to the ideals of dialogue, peace and mutual understanding.

[DG awards medal to Prince Prince Khalid Bin Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz]

Let me conclude by again thanking His Royal Highness for being with us today, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its continuous support.

Thank you for your attention.